

Senior Violin Lecture Recital
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 490)

By
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Thesis Advisor
Mary Kothman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Kothman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "M" and a trailing flourish.

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May 2012

Abstract

A senior violin recital, incorporating researched prefaces that contextualize each work performed. The performance was given Wednesday, April 11, 2012 in Choral Hall, and featured the music of Bach, Mozart, Telemann, Pärt, and Massenet.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mary Kothman not only for her advisory throughout my preparation for this thesis this semester, but for four years of tutoring. She has led by example, a model of professionalism and perseverance for my development as an artist and as a scholar.

I would also like to extend thanks to Alex Leachman, who volunteered to videotape the concert, edited the recording, and produced the finished CD.

Personal Statement

The initial consideration of my senior honors thesis project here at Ball State University led me down a path of soul searching. I had been throwing around possibilities since my junior year, making notes on literary topics of interest that I might research or debate whenever the smallest idea crossed my mind. But for more than a year, potential thesis after thesis faded from favor. There were countless angles of study that I could take in the field of English Literature, the major that I will finish my degree in this May, but one project proposal lingered in the back of my mind, and the allure of that project always superseded the intrigue of any other I could devise.

The greatest deciding factor in my enrollment at Ball State over other universities was the opportunity to continue studying the violin, a longstanding passion of mine. I had experienced some success at the previous level in music, having ascending to the position of concertmaster of my high school orchestra, but having only studied the instrument for three years at the time of the collegiate audition process, my intonation was far from satisfactory, and my technique was fundamentally flawed. While I was not talented enough to study music education as planned, I studied the violin as an instrumental minor beginning in my freshman year. After a few semesters, I developed a passion for literature and writing, redirecting the focus of my degree from music to a career in English. Although my concentration had shifted, my passion for music endured. Therefore, in choosing my honors thesis this year, I could not shake the desire to prove how far I have come since my audition for the school of music to my colleagues, to myself, and to the university that gave me the opportunity to perfect my skill. There could be no better way to complete my degree than by showing the maturity I've come into as a musician after four years. By adding a lecture component to the recital, I integrated the research and writing skills that I had likewise developed through my English studies.

After expressing my interest in a senior recital to Mary Kothman, my private teacher of four years, we began preparation of my program in the fall. I wanted to incorporate work of various musical periods and styles, so as to display the variety of techniques I have mastered and the depth of musical expression that I have acquired. Having studied the Unaccompanied Sonatas and Partitas of Johann Sebastian Bach for some time, "Sonata No. 1 in G Minor" was a natural selection. The piece was one I had only recently begun to work on, and was quickly becoming a favorite of mine because of the imbedded harmonies and the intensity the piece emoted.

In my junior year, I had performed a duet with pianist Celia Villacres during a chamber ensemble course, composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. After confirming her interest in playing, both movements of "Sonata No. 21 in E Minor" were added to the new program. Although we had worked on the piece before, there were still kinks to be ironed out, and this recital would give us the opportunity to perform the piece in front of a substantial audience.

A less traditional inclusion was Jules Massenet's "Meditation" from the opera *Thais*. Unlike the previous choices, the "Mediation" was not a standard sonata but a single passionate interlude. The beautiful work required excellent intonation, and demanded an impassioned interpretation from its soloist in order to do justice to its dramatic passages. The piece represented a great contrast to the way I'd begin the concert, and would end up concluding the recital.

Upon my insistence, Arvo Pärt's "Fratres" was added to the program, but not without much hesitance on the part of my advisor. A ten-minute work by a contemporary composer, the piece was far and away the most technically difficult of the program, and one that would be

challenging to violinists much more talented than I. Although I understood her concerns, the piece was a favorite of mine, and one that could demonstrate many skills I had developed, if I could learn to play it in time. After some initial reluctance, Mrs. Kothman rewarded my determination by working with me to prepare the piece, and decided that I could perform “Fratres” for the recital if I could learn it better than any of the other pieces in a few months’ time.

The final addition to the program was Georg Philipp Telemann’s “Sonata No. 2 in D Major.” The violin duet was the least difficult piece to play from a technical perspective, but added some ensemble diversity to the program, and allowed me to show my audience that I could play off of another strong string player: my colleague, Carrie Harris.

Preparation for the recital consisted of increased practice and research. The regimen that stuck best was two-hour blocks, six days a week, during which I typically warmed up and ironed out the mistakes I made in one or two of my pieces each day. I changed the fingerings of my notes countless times leading up to my recital, altered the direction and slurring of my bow, and repetitively articulated tedious passages, especially those found in the Mozart and Pärt works. In early March, I began rehearsing weekly with my accompanists, Celia, Carrie, and pianist Suham Bello Brenes. Carrie and I decided which player would lead off the canon (a piece in which both players play the same music, but one comes in a few measures late and ends earlier than the former), and spent most of our rehearsal time synching up our entrances and ending, as well as increasing the tempo of the piece with the help of a metronome. Celia and I revived our study of Mozart, and focused our efforts on bringing out what dynamic contrast best reflected my interpretation of the piece.

Suham and I worked on both the Massenet and Pärt, which became the two most stressful works for me. The “Mediation” demanded not only an emotional investment from its soloist to be successful, but also the greatest attention to intonation, since the notes could ascend and descend rapidly over such a wide range. The accompanying piano part could betray any deviation from perfect intonation because of its rich harmonies, making each rehearsal very important. “Fratres,” on the other hand, was a work that required little dependence on the piano from its soloist, as the piano part merely provided a chordal foundation for its virtuosic passages. Keeping an honest tempo, however, became an issue. I would master the notes of a given passage privately, only to realize in rehearsal with Suham that the tempo at which I was accustomed to playing was not steady. The simple pedaled chords in the piano part, evenly spaced, would give away whether I had sped up or slowed down too much in order to compensate for the difficulty of the passage. Therefore, the rehearsal time for “Fratres” was dedicated to keeping my tempo steady for the duration of the long composition.

What I wanted to accomplish by adding a researched preface to each work performed was to contextualize these diverse pieces in a way that would allow a less informed audience to appreciate the history behind each work. For the Bach, my research centered on Bach’s intermission from religious music, during which he wrote his greatest secular works. I also wanted to describe the harmony used in the solo work in a way that demonstrated how the chords could act not as single notes, but as accompaniments. My research into the Mozart led me to describe the composer’s brief time in Mannheim, where his environment inspired six sonatas, including the one I performed. The Telemann piece’s preface elaborates on the difference in how the composer was appreciated during his time compared to the present, and explains the canon form. The Pärt research explains the composer’s invented style of minimalism, and the many

different arrangements of “Fratres.” Finally, my research into the “Mediation” focused on the plot of the opera, *Thaïs*.

In the week leading up to the recital, I gave two run-throughs of the program before my fellow violin students. Despite my strong background in theatre and other forms of competition, nerves are one concern that never seems to ease up, so these performance classes, along with rehearsals in front of friends, served to relieve some of the anxiousness I had. By this time, I had perfected each piece as much as could be done in time for the recital, yet during these performances I made mistakes that I had never once made in private practice, including some missed fingerings in familiar places and an overly tense bow arm that produced a shaky sound. To aid my bowing and improve my tone overall, Mrs. Kothman lent me her violin bow, which made a tremendous difference in my sound simply by being made of finer material. Although I struggled in some of these practice performances, I learned not to correct myself; instead I adjusted, maintained composure, and finished out each piece professionally. I acknowledged the reality that something could go wrong during the recital, and that a simple mistake could not be allowed to deter my confidence. In my final dress rehearsal the night before my recital, I played almost flawlessly; so much so that as a performer, one superstitiously hopes that he or she has not wasted his or her best before the show. My confidence, however, remained strong.

The recital itself went very well, in my estimation. The turnout was strong for an intimate performance, with a dozen members of my family, about ten of my close friends, Mrs. Kothman’s family and several honors students in attendance. My nerves could be heard in the introduction to my first piece, but after those first words and the first chord of the Bach, the tension decompressed, and my performance did not suffer. Getting into a piece like the Bach sonata is always the most difficult aspect of playing it, for one must establish the feeling of the work immediately as though he or she has already been playing it for some time. This time, the first chord was not perfectly drawn from the bow, but I adjusted in the second chord, and the performance finished strong, setting a good precedent for the night.

The Mozart sonata followed. Prior to the recital, Celia and I agreed to decrease the tempo by a hair, so that my staccato eighth notes could be better articulated, and this adjustment made all the difference, especially in the second movement, which I felt to that point had been a weakness of the program. This time, both the first and second movements were played with great enthusiasm and clarity. The first half of the program was rounded out by the Telemann violin duet. This piece had really begun to shine in the last week once Carrie and I increased the tempo, and the spirited work flew by with only a minor stumble on my part.

After intermission, the program resumed with “Fratres.” The progress I made over the last few months had been dramatic to say the least, and the piece had become a strong foundation for the concert if I could maintain my composure throughout. Like the Bach, the first passage was a two-page long solo, and beginning the piece required resolute confidence. This time around, I was more successful. In fact, “Fratres” ended up being my strongest performance of the night, and one that drew great reviews from the audience. The many theme variations were met and conquered, and only the high-pitched double-note chords gave me trouble: a section that I was never quite able to master.

“Fratres” ended up lasting thirteen minutes, which took a toll on my energy. Unfortunately, this impacted my performance of the “Meditation,” as my concentration broke several times, resulting in flat pitches. If I could change anything about the concert, I would have given myself more time to compose, so that I could perform this piece like I had the night before.

But all in all, I'm reluctant to complain, given how well "Fratres" went, as both Mrs. Kothman's primary concern and mine.

As a music minor, a senior recital was not a requirement in earning my degree. By giving this performance, I wanted to thank Ball State for allowing me to pursue my musical aspirations while I figured out my career path. I wanted to overcome some of the nervousness that comes with performing at a high level, and in doing so demonstrate the maturity I now have. Most of all, I wanted to prove to myself what can be achieved with enough resilience. I could have easily dropped violin and music altogether after the disappointment of failing as a music major, but I picked myself up and made the most of my opportunity to study, and will be forever grateful for this chance at redemption.

Kyle Lesniewicz

Program Notes

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

"Sonata No. 1 in G Minor," I. Adagio, S. 1001 (1720)

A marquee composer of his time, Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach composed primarily for the organ, and gained much notoriety for his skill on the instrument. The majority of his compositions were written for use in the Lutheran Church, to which his family was highly devout. However, from 1717-1723, Bach was employed by Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen as the both composer and conductor of his court chamber orchestra (Emery and Wolff 316). The prince was a Calvinist, whose church relied strictly on their hymns for music within the mass. Without the need to compose religious works, Bach took advantage of the opportunity to explore secular compositions, and in doing so produced his most acclaimed instrumental works during this period, including the six Brandenburg Concertos, overtures, and unaccompanied cello suites ("Johann Sebastian Bach" 4) (317).

The Unaccompanied Sonatas and Partitas for violin were also composed during this period, written for violinist Josephus Spiess. Bach referred to these unaccompanied sonatas and partitas as the "church sonatas" (Affelder 1). Each one follows the same tempo scheme of slow first and third movements between fast-paced second and final movements. These chamber solos, including Sonata No. 1, are profusely draped with embellishment and consecutive chords, creating an implied polyphony. The effect is that one hears the harmony as though as many as four instruments were playing through one soloist. A simple passage like the following, then:



Is transformed into the more developed finished passage:



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

"Sonata No. 21 in E Minor," K304 (1778)

Thanks in part to the rigorous musical training imbued by his father, Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart became widely renown as a prodigy from the age of six, both for his prowess on the keyboard and his foray into composition ("Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart" 1). Mozart applied his technical genius to every major form of music prevalent during the Classical era, especially in the field of opera, earning the praise of critics then and now.

Mozart composed Sonata No. 21 early in the summer of 1778 during a three-year stint in Paris and Mannheim (Eisen and Sadie 298). The composer had been perfecting a more elaborate style that he developed in Vienna, which culminated in his writing six violin sonatas, K. 301-6. While Mozart's earlier sonatas were written in three movements with a fast-slow-fast tempo

scheme, the K 301-5 each comprised only two movements: the first, a brisk Allegro, followed by a more moderate conclusion, typically at the pace of a minuet. Audiences and critics of the time believed these sonatas to be heavily influenced by the cities in which they were written; wrote Mozart's own sister, Nannerl, "anyone could tell [Sonata No. 21] was written in Mannheim" (298). In a letter to his father, Mozart credited the varied styles in the accompanied divertimentos of German fellow composer Joseph Schuster as inspirations for the Mannheim sonatas, including No. 21. Written in E minor, contemporary theory critics of this piece remain fascinated with what they describe as eerie, even "claustrophobic" moments within the voices' give and take.

GEORG PHILIPP TELEMANN (1681-1767)

"Sonata No. 2 in D Major," I. Spirituoso

Linking the Baroque era to the Classical, Telemann was the most prolific composer of his time. Although the works of his contemporaries Bach and Handel are held in higher regard today, Telemann was considered the model composer of his time (Zohn 199). Telemann was not a musical innovator from a technical perspective, but he was culturally innovative, blending German, Polish, French and Italian styles into what the so-called "German mixed taste," and advocating for the use of German language in the determination of tempo and expression ("Georg Philipp Telemann" 2). Whereas Bach wrote compositions requiring virtuosic talent, Telemann shied away from the extremes of difficulty for the practical purpose of dissemination: he desired that his works be not confined to courts and concert halls, but be equally played within the common German's home (Fairley 1).

Sonata No. 2 is one of Telemann's canonic sonatas, taken from a collection published in the 18th century, titled "Six Canons of Sonatas for two German Flutes or two Violins, compos'd by Georg Philipp Telemann" (Fairley 1). The movements of each sonata are two-voice canons played in unison. One player will begin and finish the piece in its entirety, while a second player begins at a *dal segno* (meaning "from the sign") and finishes the piece at a written fermata.

ARVO PÄRT (b. 1935)

"Fratres," (1980)

The works of contemporary Estonian composer Arvo Pärt are firmly grounded in his dedication to sacred music and minimalistic integrity. While his earliest works were atonal, Pärt never strayed too far from tonality, often incorporating it into his experimental works. After a long hiatus from composition, Pärt returned in 1976, writing in a style developed all his own referred to as *tintinnabuli*. The word itself mimics the resonance of ringing bells, and inspiration for this style came from Pärt's study of medieval and Renaissance music, including Gregorian chant and the works of Josquin des Prez, fused with his religious passion (Bryars 729). At the heart of these new works is an emphasis on tonal monody and the inversion of a single chord, often divided among voices and moving in a stepwise fashion.

Fratres, Latin for "brothers" or "friars," was originally composed in 1977, one of the first works composed in the *tintinnabuli* style. Originally arranged for chamber ensemble incorporating winds, brass, string and percussion, Pärt has since arranged the piece for choir (1983), string quartet (1985), wind octet (1990) and strings with percussion (1991) (Hillier 165).

Fratres for violin and piano, written in 1980, is not merely an arrangement of the 1977 piece but an altogether separate work, based on the original theme but involving a wider array of techniques and variations.

JULES ÉMILE FRÉDÉRIC MASSENET (1842-1912)

“Meditation” (1894)

from *Thaïs* (1894)

French composer Jules Massenet’s “Thaïs” debuted in March of 1894 to great success, one of four operas the composer premiered that year. The opera featured a maverick libretto by Louis Gallet written in prose, described by one contemporary critic as “poésie mélrique,” emphasizing linguistic use of poetic assonance over the traditional rhyme and meter one expected. The inspiration for the opera came from a widely popular French novel by Anatole France of the same name, written four years earlier. With this choice of subject, Massenet capitalized on the narrative’s existing familiarity, exotic backdrop, and combined religious fervor with eroticism: a favorite thematic device of the composer.

Set in the Thebaid district of 4th century Egypt, the plot follows a Christian monk who believes himself divinely compelled to convert one courtesan, Thaïs, to from her sinful lifestyle to faith. The monk succeeds, but loses himself in the process, swayed by carnal desire and undone by his love for Thaïs: a love never realized, as the opera concludes with Thaïs’s premature death, and the monk’s ensuing despair. In the context of the opera, *Meditation* serves as the entr’acte between the second and third acts (Eggebrecht and Steinbeck 95). The piece embodies the awakening conscience of Thaïs as her conversion is realized. In the passionate swoons of the violin, Massenet captures not only the harlot’s enlightenment, but also the erotic energy and conflict of faith that has taken hold of the monk.

Kyle Lesniewicz

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**BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

KYLE LESNIEWICZ
violin

SENIOR HONORS RECITAL

assisted by

Celia Villacres, piano – Carrie Harris, violin
Suham Bello Brenes, piano

Sonata No. 1 in G Minor Johann Sebastian Bach
Adagio (1685-1750)

Sonata No. 21 in E Minor..... Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Allegro (1756-1791)

Tempo di Menuetto

Celia Villacres, piano

Sonata No. 2 in D Major Georg Phillip Telemann
Spiritoso (1681-1767)

Carrie Harris, violin

. . . Intermission . . .

Fratres.....Arvo Pärt
(b.1935)

Suham Bello Brenes, piano

Meditation from "Thais".....Jules Massenet
(1842-1912)

Suham Bello Brenes, piano

Kyle Lesniewicz is a student of Mary Kothman.

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Honors Program at Ball State University.

CHORAL HALL
Wednesday, April 11, 2012
5:30 p.m.

Series LXVI
Number 217

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School of Music

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**Robert E. Marsh Horn Ensemble and Trombone Choir**

Wednesday, April 11, Sursa Hall, 5:30pm

**Faculty Artist Series:**

**Keith Sweger, bassoon and Patricia Sweger, piano**

Wednesday, April 11, Sursa Hall, 7:30pm

**Faculty Artist Series:**

**Yoko Shimazaki-Kilburn, soprano, and Ray Kilburn, piano**

Thursday, April 12, Sursa Hall, 5:30pm

**Graduate String Quartet**

Thursday, April 12, Choral Hall, 7:30pm

**University Singers Children's Show**

Friday, April 13, Emens Auditorium, 9:30am

**University Singers 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Spectacular**

Friday, April 13, Emens Auditorium, 7:30pm

Saturday, April 14, Emens Auditorium, 7:30pm

**Women's Chorus, Statesmen, Choral Union**

Sunday, April 15, Sursa Hall, 3:00pm

**Student Composers Forum**

Monday, April 16, Sursa Hall, 7:30pm

**Student Jazz Combos**

Tuesday, April 17, Choral Hall, 5:30pm

**Woodwind Chamber Music**

Wednesday, April 18, Sursa Hall, 5:30pm

*Additional concerts and recitals are posted on the University Calendar.*